

ELLIOTT J. GORN ~ RANDY ROBERTS ~ TERRY D. BILHARTZ

FIFTH EDITION



CONSTRUCTING THE AMERICAN PAST

A Source Book of a People's History

VOLUME 2

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For our children

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Rocky Bilhartz and Lindsey Lee Bilhartz

PREFACE

Every historian knows the feeling. You're working in an archive, sleepy and bored, when something jumps out at you. Maybe a letter written by someone who has been dead a hundred years boldly states an idea that was just a glimmer in your mind; or a diary that turns up unexpectedly takes you into the inner life of someone who seemed so unknowable before; or an eyewitness account of clashing armies makes you see and hear and smell the battlefield. Doing history can be as exciting as any act of discovery and exploration.

We developed this anthology to communicate some of that excitement to students. All three of us take pride in our work as teachers and writers of history. Sometimes, however, those two sides of the historian's job seem terribly distant from each other. Bridging that gap is our task here. We have tried to put some of our best teaching between these covers. We hope students will learn the challenges, the rigors, and the joys of hands-on history. Our goal is to present students with exciting documents on a series of topics that will help them learn to think critically.

Each chapter centers on a particular problem in American history. The introductions, documents, and study questions direct students to participate in the past. What was it like, for example, to be at a religious revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century? Who attended them and why? Our chapter on camp meetings offers eyewitness accounts. To give another example, what really happened at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890? Students read descriptions of the clash between the Sioux and the U.S. cavalry from a variety of vantage points: the voices of the Sioux, the letters of military officers, and the statements of government officials.

The fifth edition of *Constructing the American Past*, volume 2, contains major changes. In addition to smaller modifications, the last two chapters are brand new, one on the reformist impulses of the 1960s and 1970s—including documents from the women's movement, the United Farm Workers, and the environmental movement—and a chapter on the rise of conservatism toward the end of the century. We have also returned to two subjects from past editions of *Constructing the American Past*, the "Zoot Suit Riots" during World War II, and the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam era. As always, we have tried to improve the volume's classroom usefulness,

and to present a wide range of American experiences. We have sought as much as possible to include both male and female voices, as well as voices from diverse social and ethnic populations.

As we compiled these volumes, we also compiled debts. We want to thank the library staffs at Purdue, Miami, Stanford, and Sam Houston State Universities; at the Museum of the City of New York; the Western College Archives; the archives of the Southern Regional Council, Atlanta; the Library of Congress; the New York Public Library; the Newberry Library; the American Antiquarian Society; the Huntington Library; and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

Many colleagues and graduate students have made suggestions and corrected us when we went astray. We especially acknowledge the assistance of Arthur Casciato, Allan Winkler, Jack Kirby, Mary Frederickson, James Hamill, Lynn Dumenil, Joshua Brown, Margo Horn, Timothy Gilfoyle, Paul Hutton, Howard Shorr, Gary Bell, Greg Cantrell, James Olson, Roseanne Barker, Ken Hendrickson, Caroline Crimm, Ty Cashion, Joseph Rowe, and Robert Shadle.

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Many of the events and documents in this collection were first used in our own classrooms. We thank all of our students over the years who have helped teach us about teaching. We dedicate this work to our children, our representatives in the next generation, who will construct their own pasts in order to understand themselves and their future. To this illustrious list, which includes Jade Rachel Yee-Gorn, Alison MacKenzie Roberts, Kelly Rankin Roberts, Teri Noel Bilhartz, Rocky Bilhartz, and Lindsey Lee Bilhartz.

INTRODUCTION

Constructing the Past

History is *constructed*; human beings make their lives. The generation that decided to end slavery in America, for example, chose that path, just as generations before had opted to continue enslaving African Americans. The discipline of history assumes that the unfolding of the past is not ordained by God or nature, but by humankind.

But there is another meaning to the phrase “*constructing* the American past.” There is no single correct narrative for any given historical episode. Historians have interpreted the Civil War for over a hundred years, and they continue to argue over what were the causes of the war, why the North won and the South lost, whether or not the war might have been averted, and countless other questions. It is not true that one interpretation of history is as valid as another; some historians argue with better logic, larger context, more evidence than others. But no written history is perfect because the past is so complex, because documentation is always incomplete and contradictory, and because historians are never totally free of socially shaped assumptions and their own personal biases.

Constructing the American Past, volume II, challenges you to become an historian. Each chapter provides background information and documentary evidence for a particular historical episode. Your goal is to reconstruct what happened, to put events in context, and to explore their meanings. Was being an immigrant at the turn of the century a positive or negative experience? What was at stake in the Scopes “Monkey” trial in the 1920s? What was it like to live through the Great Depression? There are no easy answers, but the sources allow you to construct an historical story and offer your own ideas.

Each chapter begins with a brief essay that sets the historical context for the episode. Following the essay is a selection of primary documents, with each document or group of documents preceded by an introductory headnote. Three sets of study questions follow the documents. The “Defining Terms” section invites readers to review the chapter’s key figures, events, and ideas; “Probing the Sources” questions raise specific points about the sources; “Interpreting the Sources” questions seek more speculative responses about the meaning and importance of the chapter’s subject. “Additional Reading” provides suggestions for other sources and readings

on the subject. The best way to introduce you to this book is to give you a sample of what we are trying to do.

INSIDE THE JUNGLE

Historical Context

A cow grazes in Texas. A month later, part of it is being eaten by a family in New Jersey. This would not have happened before the Civil War, yet it was commonplace by 1900. What happened? Technology was important—the railroad connected the Great Plains with the East, so that shipping goods over hundreds, even thousands of miles now took but a few days. Also refrigeration allowed freshly butchered beef to be preserved. But equally important was the mental leap of thinking of meat as just one more product in the marketplace.

The key was keeping goods cheap through mass production. If thousands of cattle—which required a lot of space to raise—could be brought together and slaughtered systematically, and every part of each animal made into a commodity with a market value, then costs would come down, manufacturers might ship dressed meat to distant places for less money than local butchers could produce it, and beef would be consumed by more and more new customers. Butchers—skilled tradesmen whose labor was expensive—could be replaced by countless unskilled workers who performed but one task over and over, such as cutting off a particular part of the cow as it came down the “disassembly line.” These ideas did not occur all at once, but slowly a handful of Chicago entrepreneurs in competition with each other turned what had been a locally based business into a national industry. The result was the famous Packingtown on Chicago’s South Side, roughly a mile-and-a-half square bordered by Thirty-Ninth and Fifty-First Streets, and by Halsted and Western, filled with meatpacking plants and slaughterhouses.

Packingtown stank. It was ugly, dangerous, and unhealthy. Entering Packingtown from the north, a visitor was greeted—or perhaps insulted—by two prominent landmarks. The main entrance to the Union Stockyards was an imposing stone and iron gate that dwarfed humans and served as a grim portent of the serious and difficult work inside. Snaking its way to the west of the stockyards was Bubbly Creek, a branch of the Chicago River named for the carbolic acid gas that rose to the surface from the decaying wastes. The gasses of Bubbly Creek mixed with the odors of dying animals and decaying meat, and a series of uncovered dumps gave Packingtown its unforgettable smell.

Forty thousand people lived and worked in Packingtown. Most resided in poorly constructed frame houses that were often firetraps. Unlike better South Side neighborhoods, Packingtown’s roads were largely unpaved and its sewage facilities were inadequate. The uncollected garbage, open sewers, and accumulated filth lowered health standards as well as human morale. Tuberculosis was the major scourge, but bronchitis, diphtheria, and other contagious diseases also claimed their victims. Children were especially vulnerable; one out of every three infants did not live to a second birthday.

The residents of Packingtown, mostly immigrants from central Europe and Scandinavia at the turn of the century, tolerated these dreadful conditions for a chance to work in the packinghouses. For them, the words *job* and *work* were mag-

ical. Mary McDowell, an early observer of the immigrants, remarked that *job* was the first English word the new arrivals learned: "The children lisp it; the aged cling to it to the end. A steady job or 'Please give me a job' is ever at the front of their minds or on the tips of their tongues." The jobs they acquired were difficult and dangerous—very dangerous. And for risking lives and limbs, unskilled workers were paid between fifteen and eighteen cents per hour, barely enough to starve by inches. Seasoned or cynical immigrants might take refuge in the old Yiddish proverb: "If the rich could pay people to die for them, the poor would make a wonderful living."

Many of the jobs the immigrants filled bordered on torture. Historian James R. Barrett, in his study of Chicago's packinghouse workers, has written, "Each job had its own dangers: the dampness and cold of the packing rooms and hide cellar; the sharp blade of the beef boner's knife; the noxious dust of the wool department and fertilizer plant; the wild charge of a half-crazed steer on the killing floor." And the frantic pace forced on the workers increased the chances of serious injury. Often the results read more like battlefield casualty reports than worker accidents. During the first six months of 1910, Swift and Company reported 3,500 injuries serious enough to require a physician's care. And in 1917 Armour workers became ill or injured over 22,000 times.

A man named Upton Sinclair came to Packingtown in 1904. He did not come as a worker looking for a job but as a writer in pursuit of a subject. Workers had just lost a major strike, and Sinclair went to the stockyards to observe their lives. Thirty-five years old, he had been a novelist for many years. The literary marketplace rewarded sensational writing, and the ambitious young Sinclair had been successful with tales of love and blood and revenge. But he was also ambitious to produce "art." Writing dime novels, even though it supported his family and paid for his education, failed to satisfy his soul. Sinclair's early efforts at serious fiction were commercial and artistic failures. His characters, like the author himself, were consumed with the idea of individual genius, with the rather romantic notion of the suffering and misunderstood artist dedicated to the singularity of his private vision. But then Upton Sinclair had what amounted to a religious conversion—he discovered socialism.

The turn of the century became known as the "progressive era." Government at the local, state, and federal levels intervened more than ever before in the workings of the economy to protect citizens' welfare. The Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations all attempted to restore competition to a few of those industries where corporate oligopolies had emerged; states instituted electoral reforms that were designed to assure widened citizen participation; local governments across the country attempted to regulate public utilities in the name of fairness. But even as such reforms tried to adjust society, many Americans called for much more sweeping change.

In 1889, Edward Bellamy wrote a utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, that became an instant best-seller. Bellamy envisioned an America where factories and stores were owned collectively and citizens ran the economy democratically. For the next twenty-five years, collectivist ideas became widely expressed. Various organizations for bringing the enormous new corporations under public control were advanced, but after 1900, the Socialist Party was the most noteworthy. Socialists wanted to nationalize the means of production—factories, mills, and

mines must be owned by the state; no more private profits for capitalists and low wages for workers. Capitalism might have been around from the beginning, socialists argued, but corporations were new, and they so concentrated private wealth and power that they threatened American democracy. Through the political process the socialists would attempt to remake America. They saw their cause as a patriotic calling. The Socialist Party never threatened to displace the Democrats or Republicans, but before World War I, dozens of socialists became legislators, mayors, and councilmen, while the Socialist Party candidate for President, Eugene V. Debs, garnered nearly one million votes (six percent of the electorate) in 1912.

Sinclair remained an ambitious writer, but by 1904, his faith in the socialist cause led his work away from depicting suffering artists toward analyzing the plight of American workers. New magazines like *McClure's* had published so-called "muckraking" journalists such as Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Stephens, but Sinclair was much more radical than them. He went to Packingtown, studied the factories, the workers, and the "Back-of-the-Yards" neighborhoods. He wrote rapidly and intensely. His novel, *The Jungle*, was first published in serial form in 1905, not in the mainstream press but in the *Appeal to Reason*, a popular socialist newspaper based in Girard, Kansas.

The Jungle came out in book form in 1906 and was an instant success. Sinclair told the story of the Rudkus family, Lithuanian immigrants who came to America only to be used and discarded by the companies that owned Packingtown. The human and sanitary abuses Sinclair catalogued shocked Americans in 1906, and they continue to shock us today. Although *The Jungle* followed the style of literary realism, the conventions of the early twentieth century forced Sinclair to use euphemisms to discuss certain problems in the workplace. For example, he often remarks that there were no places in the packinghouses for the workers to wash their hands. The early twentieth century reader would understand that Sinclair meant that no toilet facilities were provided and that human urine and feces accumulated on the floors of the packinghouses. Despite his attempts to preserve literary delicacy, some reviewers were scandalized by Sinclair's violations of good taste and aesthetics. A reviewer for *The Outlook* declared, "to disgust the reader by dragging him through every conceivable horror, physical and moral, and to depict with lurid excitement and with offensive minuteness the life in jail and brothel—all is to overstep the object."

THE DOCUMENTS

Introduction to Document 1

The publication of *The Jungle* and the wide readership it attracted gave ammunition to the politicians who were seeking reforms in the meatpacking industry. President Roosevelt entered the fight to demand change. The result of the ferment was the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. Far from a perfect piece of legislation, it represented a compromise between the meatpacking companies and the reformers. It helped to restore confidence in the American packing industry. However, it did little for the residents of Packingtown. As Sinclair later remarked, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

DOCUMENT 1 *From The Jungle**Upton Sinclair*

Jurgis heard of these things little by little, in the gossip of those who were obliged to perpetrate them. It seemed as if every time you met a person from a new department, you heard of new swindles and new crimes. There was, for instance, a Lithuanian who was a cattle-butcher for the plant where Marija had worked, which killed meat for canning only; and to hear this man describe the animals which came to his place would have been worth while for a Dante or a Zola. It seemed that they must have agencies all over the country, to hunt out old and crippled and diseased cattle to be canned. There were cattle which had been fed on "whiskey-malt," the refuse of the breweries, and had become what the men called "steerly"—which means covered with boils. It was a nasty job killing these, for when you plunged your knife into them they would burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face; and when a man's sleeves were smeared with blood, and his hands steeped in it, how was he ever to wipe his face, or to clear his eyes so that he could see? It was stuff such as this that made the "embalmed beef" that had killed several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards; only the army beef, besides, was not fresh canned, it was old stuff that had been lying for years in the cellars.

Then one Sunday evening, Jurgis sat puffing his pipe by the kitchen stove, and talking with an old fellow whom Jonas had introduced, and who worked in the canning-rooms at Durham's; and so Jurgis learned a few things about the great and only Durham canned goods, which had become a national institution. They were regular alchemists at Durham's; they advertised a mushroom-catsup, and the men who made it did not know what a mushroom looked like. They advertised "potted chicken,"—and it was like the boarding-house soup of the comic papers, through which a chicken had walked with rubbers on. Perhaps they had a secret process for making chickens chemically—who knows? said Jurgis's friend; the things that went into the mixture were tripe, and the fat of pork, and beef suet, and hearts of beef, and finally the waste ends of veal, when they had any. They put these up in several grades, and sold them at several prices; but the contents of the cans all came out of the same hopper. And then there was "potted game" and "potted grouse," "potted ham," and "devilled ham"—de-vyled, as the men called it. "De-vyled" ham was made out of the waste ends of smoked beef that were too small to be sliced by the machines; and also tripe, dyed with chemicals so that it would not show white; and trimmings of hams and corned beef; and potatoes, skins and all; and finally the hard cartilaginous gullets of beef, after the tongues had been cut out. All this ingenious mixture was ground up and flavored with spices to make it taste like something. Anybody who could invent a new imitation had been sure of a fortune from old Durham, said Jurgis's informant; but it was hard to think of anything new in a place where so many sharp wits had been at work for so long; where men welcomed tuberculosis in the cattle they were feeding, because it made them fatten more quickly; and where they bought up all the old rancid butter left over in the grocery-stores of a continent, and "oxidized" it by a forced-air process, to take away the odor, rechurned it with skim-milk, and sold it in bricks in the cities! Up to a year or two ago it had been the custom to kill horses in the yards—ostensibly for fertilizer; but after long agitation the newspapers had been able to make the public realize that the horses were being canned. Now it was against the law to kill horses in Packingtown, and the law was really complied with—for the present, at any rate. Any day, however, one might see sharp-horned and shaggy-haired creatures running with the sheep—and yet what a job you would have to get the public to believe that a good part of what it buys for lamb and mutton is really goat's flesh!

There was another interesting set of statistics that a person might have gathered in Packingtown—those of the various afflictions of the workers. . . . There were the men in the pickle-rooms, for instance, where old Antanas had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails,—they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking-rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling-rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time-limit that a man could work in the chilling-rooms was said to be five years. There were the wool-pluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle-men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned-meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood-poisoning. Some worked at the stamping-machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off. . . . As for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard! . . .

During this time that Jurgis was looking for work occurred the death of little Kristoforas, one of the children of Teta Elzbieta. . . . Perhaps it was the smoked sausage he had eaten that morning—which may have been made out of some of the tubercular pork that was condemned as unfit for export. At any rate, an hour after eating it, the child had begun to cry with pain, and in another hour he was rolling about on the floor in convulsions. Little Kotrina, who was all alone with him, ran out screaming for help, and after a while a doctor came, but not until Kristoforas had howled his last howl. No one was really sorry about this except poor Elzbieta, who was inconsolable. Jurgis announced that so far as he was concerned the child would have to be buried by the city, since they had no money for a funeral; and at this the poor woman almost went out of her senses, wringing her hands and screaming with grief and despair. Her child to be buried in a pauper's grave! And her stepdaughter to stand by and hear it said without protesting! It was enough to make Ona's [Jurgis's wife] father rise up out of his grave and rebuke her! If it had come to this, they might as well give up at once, and be buried all of them together! . . . In the end Marija said that she would help with ten dollars; and Jurgis being still obdurate, Elzbieta went in tears and begged the money from the neighbors, and so little Kristoforas had a mass and a hearse with white plumes on it, and a tiny plot in a graveyard with a wooden cross to mark the place. The poor mother was not the same for months after that; the mere sight of the floor where little Kristoforas had crawled about would make her weep. He had never had a fair chance, poor little fellow, she would

say. He had been handicapped from his birth. If only she had heard about it in time, so that she might have had the great doctor to cure him of his lameness! . . . Some time ago, Elzbieta was told, a Chicago billionaire had paid a fortune to bring a great European surgeon over to cure his little daughter of the same disease from which Kristoforas had suffered. And because this surgeon had to have bodies to demonstrate upon, he announced that he would treat the children of the poor, a piece of magnanimity over which the papers became quite eloquent. Elzbieta, alas, did not read the papers, and no one had told her; but perhaps it was as well, for just then they would not have had the car-fare to spare to go every day to wait upon the surgeon, nor for that matter anybody with the time to take the child.

All this while that he was seeking for work, there was a dark shadow hanging over Jurgis; as if a savage beast were lurking somewhere in the pathway of his life, and he knew it, and yet could not help approaching the place. There were all stages of being out of work in Packingtown, and he faced in dread the prospect of reaching the lowest. There is a place that waits for the lowest man—the fertilizer-plant!

The men would talk about it in awe-stricken whispers. Not more than one in ten had ever really tried it; the other nine had contented themselves with hearsay evidence and a peep through the door. There were some things worse than even starving to death. They would ask Jurgis if he had worked there yet, and if he meant to; and Jurgis would debate the matter with himself. As poor as they were, and making all the sacrifices that they were, would he dare to refuse any sort of work that was offered to him, be it as horrible as ever it could? Would he dare to go home and eat bread that had been earned by Ona, weak and complaining as she was, knowing that he had been given a chance, and had not had the nerve to take it?—And yet he might argue that way with himself all day, and one glimpse into the fertilizer-works would send him away again shuddering. He was a man, and he would do his duty; he went and made application—but surely he was not also required to hope for success!

The fertilizer-works of Durham's lay away from the rest of the plant. Few visitors ever saw them, and the few who did would come out looking like Dante, of whom the peasants declared that he had been into hell. To this part of the yards came all the "tankage," and waste products of all sorts; here they dried out the bones—and in suffocating cellars where the daylight never came you might see men and women and children bending over whirling machines and sawing bits of bone into all sorts of shapes, breathing their lungs full of the fine dust, and doomed to die, every one of them, within a certain definite time. Here they made the blood into albumen, and made other foul-smelling things into things still more foul-smelling. In the corridors and caverns where it was done you might lose yourself as in the great caves of Kentucky. In the dust and the steam the electric lights would shine like far-off twinkling stars—red and blue, green and purple stars, according to the color of the mist and the brew from which it came. For the odors in these ghastly charnel-houses there may be words in Lithuanian, but there are none in English. The person entering would have to summon his courage as for a cold-water plunge. He would go on like a man swimming under water; he would put his handkerchief over his face, and begin to cough and choke; and then, if he were still obstinate, he would find his head beginning to ring, and the veins in his forehead to throb, until finally he would be assailed by an overpowering blast of ammonia fumes, and would turn and run for his life, and come out half-dazed. . . .

The boss of the grinding room had come to know Jurgis by this time, and had marked him for a likely man; and so when he came to the door about two o'clock this breathless hot day, he felt a sudden spasm of pain shoot through him—the boss beckoned to him! In ten minutes more Jurgis had pulled off his coat and overshirt, and set his teeth together and gone to work. Here was one more difficulty for him to meet and conquer!

His labor took him about one minute to learn. Before him was one of the vents of the mill in which the fertilizer was being ground—rushing forth in a great brown river, with a spray of the finest dust flung forth in clouds. Jurgis was given a shovel, and along with half a dozen others it was his task to shovel this fertilizer into carts. That others were at work he knew by the sound, and by the fact that he sometimes collided with them; otherwise they might as well not have been there, for in the blinding dust-storm a man could not see six feet in front of his face. When he had filled one cart he had to grope around him until another came, and if there was none on hand he continued to grope till one arrived. In five minutes he was, of course, a mass of fertilizer from head to feet; they gave him a sponge to tie over his mouth, so that he could breathe, but the sponge did not prevent his lips and eyelids from caking up with it and his ears from filling solid. He looked like a brown ghost at twilight—from hair to shoes he became the color of the building and of everything in it, and for that matter a hundred yards outside it. The building had to be left open, and when the wind blew Durham and Company lost a great deal of fertilizer.

Working in his shirt-sleeves, and with the thermometer at over a hundred, the phosphates soaked in through every pore of Jurgis's skin, and in five minutes he had a headache, and in fifteen was almost dazed. The blood was pounding his brain like an engine's throbbing; there was a frightful pain in the top of his skull, and he could hardly control his hands. Still, with the memory of his four months' siege behind him, he fought on, in a frenzy of determination; and half an hour later he began to vomit—he vomited until it seemed as if his inwards must be torn to shreds. A man could get used to the fertilizer-mill, the boss had said, if he would only make up his mind to it; but Jurgis now began to see that it was a question of making up his stomach.

At the end of that day of horror, he could scarcely stand. He had to catch himself now and then, and lean against a building and get his bearings. Most of the men, when they came out, made straight for a saloon—they seemed to place fertilizer and rattlesnake poison in one class. But Jurgis was too ill to think of drinking—he could only make his way to the street and stagger on to a car. He had a sense of humor, and later on, when he became an old hand, he used to think it fun to board a street-car and see what happened. Now, however, he was too ill to notice it—how the people in the car began to gasp and sputter, to put their handkerchiefs to their noses, and transfix him with furious glances. Jurgis only knew that a man in front of him immediately got up and gave him a seat; and that half a minute later the two people on each side of him got up; and that in a full minute the crowded car was nearly empty—those passengers who could not get room on the platform having gotten out to walk.

Of course Jurgis had made his home a miniature fertilizer-mill a minute after entering. The stuff was half an inch deep in his skin—his whole system was full of it, and it would have taken a week not merely of scrubbing, but of vigorous exercise, to get it out of him. As it was, he could be compared with nothing known to men, save that newest discovery of the savants, a substance which emits energy for an unlimited time, without being itself in the least diminished in power. He smelt so that he made all the food at the table taste, and set the whole family to vomiting; for himself it was three days before he could keep anything upon his stomach—he might wash his hands, and use a knife and fork, but were not his mouth and throat filled with the poison? . . .

With one member trimming beef in a cannery, and another working in a sausage factory, the family had a first-hand knowledge of the great majority of Packingtown swindles. For it was the custom, as they found, whenever meat was so spoiled that it could not be used for anything else, either to can it or else to chop it up into sausage. With what had been told them by Jonas, who had worked in the pickle-rooms, they could now study the whole of the spoiled-meat industry on the inside, and read a new and grim meaning into that old Packingtown jest—that they use everything of the pig except the squeal.

Jonas had told them how the meat that was taken out of pickle would often be found sour, and how they would rub it up with soda to take away the smell, and sell it to be eaten on free-lunch counters; also of all the miracles of chemistry which they performed, giving to any sort of meat, fresh or salted, whole or chopped, any color and any flavor and any odor they chose. In the pickling of hams they had an ingenious apparatus, by which they saved time and increased the capacity of the plant—a machine consisting of a hollow needle attached to a pump; by plunging this needle into the meat and working with his foot, a man could fill a ham with pickle in a few seconds. And yet, in spite of this, there would be hams found spoiled, some of them with an odor so bad that a man could hardly bear to be in the room with them. To pump into these the packers had a second and much stronger pickle which destroyed the odor—a process known to the workers as “giving them thirty per cent.” Also, after the hams had been smoked, there would be found some that had gone to the bad. Formerly these had been sold as “Number Three Grade,” but later on some ingenious person had hit upon a new device, and now they would extract the bone, about which the bad part generally lay, and insert in the hole a white-hot iron. After this invention there was no longer Number One, Two, and Three Grade—there was only Number One Grade. The packers were always originating such schemes—they had what they called “boneless hams,” which were all the odds and ends of pork stuffed into casings; and “California hams,” which were the shoulders, with big knuckle-joints, and nearly all the meat cut out; and fancy “skinned hams,” which were made of the oldest hogs, whose skins were so heavy and coarse that no one would buy them—that is, until they had been cooked and chopped fine and labelled “head cheese”!

It was only when the whole ham was spoiled that it came into the department of Elzbieta. Cut up by the two-thousand-revolutions-a-minute flyers, and mixed with half a ton of other meat, no odor that ever was in a ham could make any difference. There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was mouldy and white—it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shovelled into carts, and the man who did the shovelling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage. There were the butt-ends of smoked meat, and the scraps of corned beef, and all the odds and ends of the waste of the plants, that would be dumped into old barrels in the cellar and left there. Under the system of rigid economy which the packers enforced, there were some jobs that it only paid to do once in a long time, and among these was the cleaning out of the waste-barrels. Every spring they did it; and in the barrels would be dirt and rust and old nails and stale water—and cart load after cart load of it would be taken up and dumped into the hoppers with fresh meat, and sent out to the public's breakfast. Some of it they would make into “smoked” sausage—but as the smoking took time, and was therefore expensive, they would call upon their chemistry department, and preserve it with borax and color it with gelatine to make it brown. All of their sausage came out of the same bowl, but when they

came to wrap it they would stamp some of it “special,” and for this they would charge two cents more a pound.

Such were the new surroundings in which Elzbieta was placed, and such was the work she was compelled to do. It was stupefying, brutalizing work; it left her no time to think, no strength for anything. She was part of the machine she tended, and every faculty that was not needed for the machine was doomed to be crushed out of existence. There was only one mercy about the cruel grind—that it gave her the gift of insensibility. Little by little she sank into a torpor—she fell silent. She would meet Jurgis and Ona in the evening, and the three would walk home together, often without saying a word. Ona, too, was falling into a habit of silence—Ona, who had once gone about singing like a bird. She was sick and miserable, and often she would barely have strength enough to drag herself home. And there they would eat what they had to eat, and afterwards, because there was only their misery to talk of, they would crawl into bed and fall into a stupor and never stir until it was time to get up again, and dress by candle-light, and go back to the machines. They were so numbed that they did not even suffer much from hunger, now; only the children continued to fret when the food ran short.

Yet the soul of Ona was not dead—the souls of none of them were dead, but only sleeping; and now and then they would waken, and these were cruel times. The gates of memory would roll open—old joys would stretch out their arms to them, old hopes and dreams would call to them, and they would stir beneath the burden that lay upon them, and feel its forever immeasurable weight. They could not even cry out beneath it; but anguish would seize them, more dreadful than the agony of death. It was a thing scarcely to be spoken—a thing never spoken by all the world, that will not know its own defeat. . . .

Introduction to Document 2

The response to *The Jungle* came quickly. But was the book an accurate depiction of life in Packingtown? Historians have differed on this point. Certainly Sinclair exaggerated the plight that any one family might endure. Moreover, some have questioned how well he knew the packing industry; he spent only a few weeks in Packingtown, did not go into the factories very much, and gathered most of his information through interviews. Ralph Chaplin, also a writer and a political radical, declared in his autobiography *Wobbly*, “I thought it a very inaccurate picture of the stockyards district which I knew so well, but I waited for each installment eagerly and read it with great interest.” Above all, Sinclair minimized the resources of workers to improve their own lives even when they were feeling the brunt of an economic system that sought to buy their labor as cheaply as possible. For example, like many other middle-class Protestants of his day, Sinclair was appalled by drinking, so he interpreted workers’ saloons as places of evil rather than community institutions. Read the following autobiography of Antanas Kaztauskis, a Lithuanian immigrant who lived and worked in Packingtown. Kaztauskis’s story was published in the magazine *The Independent* three months before Sinclair began his research for *The Jungle*. As you read, think about how this autobiography confirms or contradicts Sinclair’s depiction of the lives of immigrant workers. Ask yourself about the role of unions, political organizations, churches, schools, and ethnic communities in daily life. How did working-class people adjust to their lives in America, what values and institutions did they cling to, how did they reinterpret the American dream for themselves?

DOCUMENT 2 *Antanas Kaztauskis's Story*

... We were tired out when we reached the stockyards, so we stopped on the bridge and looked into the river out there. It was so full of grease and dirt and sticks and boxes that it looked like a big, wide, dirty street, except in some places, where it boiled up. It made me sick to look at it. When I looked away I could see on one side some big fields full of holes, and these were the city dumps. On the other side were the stockyards, with twenty tall slaughter house chimneys. The wind blew a big smell from them to us. Then we walked on between the yards and the dumps and all the houses looked bad and poor. In our house my room was in the basement. I lay down on the floor with three other men and the air was rotten. I did not go to sleep for a long time. I knew then that money was everything I needed. My money was almost gone and I thought that I would soon die unless I got a job, for this was not like home. Here money was everything and a man without money must die.

The next morning my friends woke me up at five o'clock and said, "Now, if you want life, liberty and happiness," they laughed, "you must push for yourself. You must get a job. Come with us." And we went to the yards. Men and women were walking in by thousands as far as we could see. We went to the doors of one big slaughter house. There was a crowd of about 200 men waiting there for a job. They looked hungry and kept watching the door. At last a special policeman came out and began pointing to men, one by one. Each one jumped forward. Twenty-three were taken. Then they all went inside, and all the others turned their faces away and looked tired. I remember one boy sat down and cried, just next to me, on a pile of boards. Some policemen waved their clubs and we all walked on. I found some Lithuanians to talk with, who told me they had come every morning for three weeks. Soon we met other crowds coming away from other slaughter houses, and we all walked around and felt bad and tired and hungry.

That night I told my friends that I would not do this many days, but would go some place else. "Where?" they asked me, and I began to see then that I was in bad trouble, because I spoke no English. Then one man told me to give him \$5 to give the special policeman. I did this and the next morning the policeman pointed me out, so I had a job. I have heard some big talk since then about my American freedom of contract, but I do not think I had much freedom in bargaining for this job with the Meat Trust. My job was in the cattle killing room. I pushed the blood along the gutter. Some people think these jobs make men bad. I do not think so. The men who do the killing are not as bad as the ladies with fine clothes who come every day to look at it, because they have to do it. The cattle do not suffer. They are knocked senseless with a big hammer and are dead before they wake up. This is done not to spare them pain, but because if they got hot and sweating with fear and pain the meat would not be so good. I soon saw that every job in the room was done like this—so as to save everything and make money. One Lithuanian, who worked with me, said, "They get all the blood out of those cattle and all the work out of us men." This was true, for we worked that first day from six in the morning till seven at night. The next day we worked from six in the morning till eight at night. The next day we had no work. So we had no good, regular hours. It was hot in the room that summer, and the hot blood made it worse.

I held this job six weeks and then I was turned off. I think some other man had paid for my job, or perhaps I was too slow. The foreman in that room wanted quick men to make the work rush, because he was paid more if the work was done cheaper and quicker. I saw now that every man was helping himself, always trying to get all the money he could. At that time I believed that all men in Chicago were grafters when they had to be. They only wanted to push themselves. Now, when I was idle I began to look about, and everywhere I saw sharp men beating out slow men like me. Even if we worked hard it did us no